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A
S E R M O N

PREACHED IN

ST JOHN'S CHAPEL,

FOR THE BENEFIT

OF THE

SUNDERLAND HUMANE SOCIETY,

ON SUNDAY, JULY 14, 1793.

BY

JOHN HAMPSON, M. A.

— See! thy son liveth!

1 KINGS xvii. 23.

SUNDERLAND:

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AND J. GRAHAM.

MDCCXCIII.

Anniversary Meeting of the Society.

RESOLVED,



JULY 16, 1793.

THAT the Thanks of this Society be given to the REV.
JOHN HAMPSON, M. A. for his excellent Sermon,
preached in Favour of this Institution; and that he be
earnestly requested to permit the Society to publish it.

GEO. ATKINSON, SECRETARY.

LUKE vii. 15.

*And he that was dead, sat up and began to speak; and
he delivered him to his mother.*

NOTHING can be more obvious than that spirit of benevolence, which runs through the whole system, and is interwoven with every part of the religion of Jesus. In nothing was our Saviour more remarkable, than in the tenderness he discovered to mankind; nor was there any thing he was more assiduous to establish, than that mutual sympathy and affection, which might teach us to 'bear one another's burdens;' to suffer in the sorrows of our fellow creatures; and to be ready, on all occasions, to exert our influence for their succour and relief.

To accomplish so desirable a purpose, and give success to a principle, which could not fail to be productive of the happiest effects, he employed the united energies of example and precept. The latter without the former is frequently observed to be nugatory and vain. However admirably any truth or duty may be pointed out, and with whatever charms it may be presented to the view, it is certain, that nothing so engages the mind as principle represented in action. We then see not the propriety only, but the beauty of holiness; and the active part a man takes in the principle he recommends, shews that he is serious in that recommendation, since it is plain he makes that a personal, which he enjoins as a general duty.

Our Saviour therefore was not content with teaching the truth, but took care to exemplify it in his own person. He 'went about doing good, healing all manner of sickness and disease,' cleansing

the lepers, giving sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, and restoring the dead to life. An instance of the last is recorded in the passage before us, and is said to have happened at a city called Nain, in the neighbourhood of Capernaum. The Evangelist adds, that on this occasion, 'many of his disciples went with him, and much people.' And as the sacred writers had generally some important meaning in their attention to the minutest circumstances, it is more than probable, St Luke would here intimate, that there was no doubt of the miracle he was about to relate; and that a great multitude being present on the occasion, it was publicly reported through all the country. 'And when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.'

In this part of the narrative, the subject that

principally demands our attention is the person they were carrying to the grave. He was "a young man." A case than which nothing can be more common. 'Man cometh up like a flower, and is cut down. All flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth.' Death does not always wait for the advance of numerous years. He frequently makes his inroads on the young and unsuspecting. When the pulse beats high, when the bosom glows with the hope of lengthened life, and the prospect of much promised pleasure, he steals upon them like the midnight robber, and in an instant ravishes his prey: and this is one among the many reasons that might be produced, why the young should be cautious in the pursuit of pleasure; should take care of what sort their enjoyments are; and should be well satisfied that they are such as will not put reflection to the blush, nor give to the moment of dissolution an additional sting. The

aged and the infirm, those who have long struggled with sickness and disease, or are exhausted by the decays of nature and the gradual waste of all destroying time, are the natural subjects of the king of terrors. But the youthful and vigorous are his captives. He rushes upon them 'like a giant.' His attack seems the more violent and impetuous as it was least suspected; and the issue of the contest should forcibly impress us with the propriety of the caution, that the 'rich should not glory in his riches, nor the strong man in his strength;' that, amidst the various concerns and employments of life, some time should be devoted to that most necessary of all studies, to learn to die; and that every man who can think, should think seriously, and so learn to 'number his days as to apply his heart unto wisdom.'

In considering the dangers of youth, it may be remarked, that they are subject not only to acute

and inflammatory diseases, which are usually sudden and decisive in their operation; but that they are more liable than others to a variety of casualties by land and sea; in peace and in war; in the duties of life; and it is painful to add, not unfrequently in the pursuit of their licentious pleasures. In the discharge of duty every man who thinks aright, will cheerfully risk the dangers of his situation, whatever they may be; and in spite of the FANATIC DREAM, THAT ALL WARS ARE UNLAWFUL, it is as much the soldier's duty to bear arms and to fight in defence of his Sovereign and his Country, as it is that of a minister to communicate religious instruction, or of any other man to perform the allowed and necessary duties of his station. But a death procured or hastened by licentiousness is of another sort; and I will not let this occasion slip, of warning the young and unthinking, in what manner and to what extent they consult their inclinations and pursue their pleasures. It is very possible to hurry

themselves into the grave by intemperance, or to provoke a sudden and untimely end in a brothel, in vile quarrels, in despicable scenes, and on scandalous occasions, in which nothing is to be expected but infamy and ruin. And in such a case, let any man reflect, what must be his sensations! He who dies in an act of duty, in the service of God or his neighbour, or in the performance of the necessary offices of his situation, dies as a man ought. He may therefore cheerfully commit his soul and his body into the hands of his merciful Creator. He may confidently call upon him in the time of his trouble, in perfect assurance that he will hear and save him. But I will not say so much for the impious and licentious libertine; nor is it easy to conceive with what face a man, who never remembered God in his prosperity, and who was possessed of no advantage, whether of mind, of body, or of fortune, which he did not lavish to the most infamous purposes, can presume to hope the mercy

of his Maker. I am not now insisting, (though nothing is so obvious) that a temperate, religious life is the only life susceptible of happiness and satisfaction; but I do insist, that he who is accessory by his vices to his own death, procures himself an end the most hopeless and the most deplorable that it is possible to conceive. He dies 'as a fool dieth;' a death of which it is difficult to say, whether it be more miserable or more contemptible.

It does not appear, that any thing like this was the case of the young man mentioned in the narrative. The contrary seems to have been the fact. For, when it is said by the Evangelist, with a sensibility suitable to the occasion, that he 'was the only son of his mother,' (who was a widow) and in all probability, the only support of her declining age, it is added, that "much people of the city was with her." They attended her, from motives of pity and esteem both for her and her departed son;

and for the pious purpose of shewing every mark of respect for a worthy character, suddenly snatched from his friends and from the world.

IN this case there was a double subject of regret. A good character removed from among men is a public loss. There is the loss of his good offices and his good example; the absence of a man whose conduct is a check upon the vicious, and an encouragement to the good. But this, though a calamity to others, is not so to himself. 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.' If the righteous perish, they are 'taken from the evil to come. They shall enter into peace. They shall rest upon their bed' of earth, 'each walking in his own uprightness,' and each living in another state in the presence of God, though unknown and invisible to men.

THE other source of regret is too obvious to be overlooked. It is the situation, the lorn, melan-

choly situation of the widowed mother; bereft of her husband and his sole surviving son; the sad relict of perhaps a numerous family, left to the mercy of an obdurate world; left to eat, if she could indeed procure it, the 'bread of affliction, with plenteousness of tears to drink;' to think of what she had lost; and to have no gleam of hope, no prospect of felicity, till she should be gathered to her fathers, and find it with her departed friends in Abraham's bosom.

SUCH, in all probability, were the reflections of Jesus, as he approached the bier, and enquired into the circumstances of the solemnity. His compassionate heart melted with tenderness. The pomp and apparatus of death, the condoling multitude, the weeping and disconsolate mother, had each their full influence on his tender and susceptible mind. 'When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, weep not; and he came and

touched the bier; and they that bare him stood still; and he said, young man, I say unto thee, arise.'

HERE was a spectacle worthy of admiration! Here was human nature, at one and the same instant, in it's lowest abasement and it's highest triumph! In the first instance laid low in death, swiftly tending to reunion with it's kindred dust; and then, to the astonishment of the surrounding multitude, restored to life and sense; the flame that was extinguished, kindled up again, and the man rising up and speaking in the presence of the applauding croud! 'And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak; and he delivered him to his mother.'

BUT I must direct your attention, still more particularly, to that striking circumstance in this solemn scene, the power and the grace of Jesus

Christ. On this occasion, how remarkably was that prediction accomplished, which said of him, 'he hath born our griefs and carried our sorrows!' How worthy an exertion was it of the Divine power, to remove the griefs, to wipe away the tears of a disconsolate and widowed mother, and to give at the same time so public a demonstration of his Supreme authority, and of the more than possibility 'that God should raise the dead!' This was indeed one of the days of the Son of Man! A day in which he triumphed gloriously, 'and led captivity captive!' A day on which humanity was gratified with a view of its noblest conquest, the conquest of death; and of more glory to the Son of God, than when, entering into Jerusalem, the people strewed their garments in the way, and cried, 'Hosannah to the King of Israel! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!'

FOR, it is to be observed here, that the vital

functions were not merely suspended. There was not only a cessation of pulse and motion, of sensation and perception ; but the man was actually dead. They had waited the usual time previous to his intended interment. Every one was persuaded he was no more ; and then, and not till then they carried him to the burial. The Evangelist expressly says, that he was dead : ' he that was dead, sat up and began to speak.'

SHOULD you wish for another and a decided proof, that this was the case, you will find it in the very design of this affecting narrative, and in every miracle recorded in the Gospel History. The Evangelists have related not all, but the most remarkable things that Jesus said and did ; and they have done so in the case before us, and in many others, for the express purpose of shewing his Divine authority and power in raising the dead. Had not this man been actually dead, it had been no miracle

which Jesus wrought in his restoration. If the vital powers were suspended only, what wonder if they resumed their office? On this supposition, it might have been said, when Jesus commanded him to arise, that the return of sense and motion was no other than a natural event; that, in that moment, nature resuming her functions, gave it's wonted motion to the heart, propelled the blood with it's usual velocity through the veins and arteries, and gave new vigour and animation to the system. But this was not the case. It was the praise of Jesus, not that he restored suspended animation; but that he raised the dead to life. And hence, it is no wonder that the people were astonished; that 'there came a fear on all; and they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us; and that God hath visited his people.'

This naturally leads me to the institution for which I this day solicit your benevolent assistance.

The friends of this institution are Christians. It is no intention of theirs, to mimic the miracles of Jesus, by vain and impossible attempts to restore the dead to life; but to save those, in whom the faculties have become torpid and inactive, from cold, from suffocation, from water, or from any other cause, which may have so far overpowered the springs of life, that without prompt and skilful assistance, death must inevitably ensue.

It would scarcely become me to invade the medical province, by enquiring into the distinguishing point between suspended animation and actual dissolution. But I may be permitted to remark, that the absence of the pulse, the loss of motion and sensation, and even of respiration, are not certain and infallible symptoms of death. Perhaps the only certain symptom is a tendency to putrefaction. And surely, the possibility of a fellow creature being committed to the earth when life might have been

restored; and the difficulty of being assured, for some time at least, that dissolution has actually taken place, ought to operate as a caution; and should induce every one, in case of accident, or sudden apparent death, to exert every effort to rekindle the expiring flame.

SUCH is the design of this Society, which, in the course of a few years, has been the means of saving many hundred lives, and even here has been already attended with the most salutary effects. Several have been restored, who, had they not been seasonably assisted, had now been numbered with the dead; and, in consequence of premiums given by the Society, several have been already saved from perishing in the ocean. It is their wish to be useful to the community; and hence, it is earnestly recommended to the Public, that the earliest application may be made; and that the means which their philanthropy has provided for saving the lives

of men, may not become abortive through the indolence or inhumanity of those, who may be present on such occasions.

LET me then propose to your imitation the example of Jesus Christ, 'the great Shepherd of the Sheep;' of him, who laid down his life for the world; and who came, 'not to destroy men's lives, but to save them!' Let me recommend this truly Humane institution to your benevolent attention. Something, at least, is in your power. You cannot, indeed, say, like the Son of Man, 'I say unto thee arise,' and restore those who are dead; but you may, through this medium, recover life when for some time suspended, and like the quivering flame, just ready to expire. You may thus do an office acceptable to God, by preserving from destruction, and bringing back to life and repentance, those who might otherwise have perished in the career of sin, with all their crimes upon their head. You may

restore many useful characters to the world, lessening the sum of human calamity, and the sad company of the fatherless and widows; drying up the tears of the unfortunate; and prolonging many worthy and valuable lives. And now, with these reflections, I leave this matter to yourselves. What your benevolence may suggest on this occasion will doubtless be pleasing to the 'God of all grace and consolation.' What you do, do it as unto him; and be assured that this 'labour of love' will by no means lose it's reward.

Now to God, &c. &c.

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